

Statement of

Michael J. Vanairsdale

Assistant Superintendent for Support Services
Fulton County School District
Atlanta, Georgia

On

The School Environment Protection Act of 2001

Given before the

**Subcommittee on Department Operations, Oversight, Nutrition and
Forestry**

Of the

Committee on Agriculture

United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Bob Goodlate, Chairman

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Good morning Chairman Goodlatte, Congresswoman Clayton, and members of the committee. On behalf of the American Association of School Administrators, representing more than 14,000 local superintendents and school system leaders, I want to thank you for the opportunity to come before you today to discuss the School Environment Protection Act of 2001.

My name is Mike Vanairsdale and I am the Assistant Superintendent for Support Services for the Fulton County School District in Georgia. I am responsible for school construction, facilities maintenance, student transportation, school nutrition, purchasing and warehousing. Our district educates more than 71,000 children in 75 schools. We employ a staff of 11,000, and our enrollment is growing at a rate of 3-4 percent annually. Fulton County will open five new schools this year and four new schools for the school year beginning in 2002.

Our mission in Fulton County is not only to educate students to be responsible, productive citizens, but also to cultivate a school environment conducive to student learning and high achievement. As a part of providing an environment conducive to student learning and high achievement, we strive to have state of the art, functional, clean, and well maintained education facilities, and we also carefully monitor the physical environment around our young people, so they can learn in safe and inviting surroundings. The safety and well being of our children

is uppermost in our minds, as we serve *in loco parentis* for their families each school day.

In Fulton County, and I am sure in other systems in Georgia and across the United States, we consistently and proactively monitor our campuses for signs of any unhealthful conditions, and implement programs to provide the safest and healthiest environment for our students.

IAQ, or indoor air quality, is a challenge in Georgia as well as many other states with high humidity and high ambient temperatures. We regularly analyze air samples for mold, mildew, and other airborne contaminants to insure proper air quality. We install floor covering that are conducive to high quality of air and reduce the opportunity for airborne contaminants. We vacuum our carpeted areas with high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters to reduce airborne particulate matter. In schools where we install new floor covering, furniture, or paint, we allow sufficient time and operation of air conditioning systems to allow sufficient time for “off gassing” of particulate matter. On a disciplined basis we replace high quality anti-microbial air filters.

In every school, we have a comprehensive reference book at the entrance of the school containing MSDS (material safety data sheets) for all chemicals, including paint and insecticides used in the school.

We regularly sample drinking water for microbiological and other contaminants. We install bottled water dispensers in all of our over 200 portable classrooms to insure our students are well hydrated with pure water.

The State of Georgia works with us and other Georgia school systems to assure the use of any pesticides follow strict safety precautions. In Fulton County, as well as in many other systems in the state, we have in place an Integrated Pest Management Plan, or IPM, which uses pesticides as only a part of the total pest control challenge, and believe me, pest control in Georgia is a challenge!

Bottom Line: As professional school administrators we care about the environment in which our kids learn and our actions demonstrate that – without federal legislation.

The issue at hand is not disagreement with safe chemical applications, but rather to prevent legislation that contains notifications and registries that mandate a significant administrative burden on the local system, with new layers of paperwork, and increased requirement on non-education related administrative time.

The suggested new law before you, with all due respect, addresses an area of concern that is already under control in our school system and I believe, most school districts throughout the nation.

This proposal, which was inserted in the Senate's version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act amendments (S. 1) without benefit of a hearing or public discussions on its various assumptions and proscriptions, would saddle schools with yet another unfunded federal mandate.

The Torricelli amendment to S. 1 was adopted without even a recorded vote. The bill before you goes so far as to dictate the precise wording of a letter the school must send to every staff member, parent and legal guardian three times per year. The amendment is a fill-in-the-blanks letter that seems to assume the very worst of intentions by local school authorities. Imagine the confusion a parent would feel in getting mail that suggests he or she should perhaps contact the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency after reading the letter.

Serving as guardians of our state's most valuable and vulnerable citizens, we sincerely suggest this legislation is a solution in search of a problem.

We at the American Association of School Administrators ask that the committee and Congress step back for a moment and review current practices. The GAO report cited by Senator Torricelli does not indicate student exposure to dangerous chemicals. Rather, in the Senator's words, the GAO "could find no credible statistics on the amounts of pesticides in public schools and no information about students' exposure to pesticides or their health impacts."

As local school systems struggle to transfer more resources into the classroom, we are constantly faced with mandates that require us to shift resources to bureaucratic solutions for problems that do not exist. This legislation is an example of such a mandate.

We ask, Mr. Chairman, that the committee give thoughtful consideration to our comments, as you address this legislation. Please know our members and staff stand ready to work with you in that endeavor.

With that, I thank you again for inviting us to testify today and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.